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Security Council

Fifty-third Year

Provisional

3871st Meeting

Thursday, 16 April 1998, 10.30 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Owada	(Japan)
Members:	Bahrain	Mr. Buallay
	Brazil	Mr. Amorim
	China	Mr. Shen Guofang
	Costa Rica	Mr. Berrocal Soto
	France	Mr. Dejammet
	Gabon	Mr. Dangue Réwaka
	Gambia	Mr. Sallah
	Kenya	Mr. Amolo
	Portugal	Mr. Monteiro
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	Slovenia	Mr. Türk
	Sweden	Mr. Dahlgren
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Weston
	United States of America	Mr. Burleigh

Agenda

The situation in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General (S/1998/318)

98-85238 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General (S/1998/318)

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/1998/318, which contains the report of the Secretary-General submitted pursuant to Security Council presidential statement S/PRST/1997/46 of 25 September 1997.

I now call on the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: On 25 September 1997, the Security Council convened at the ministerial level to consider the need for a renewed and concerted international effort to promote peace and security in Africa. The Council requested that I submit a report on the sources of conflict in Africa and how they may best be addressed. I am pleased to submit that report today.

Allow me, however, to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude to the members of the Security Council for taking this unprecedented step for Africa. Of course, not all of Africa is in crisis; not all of Africa is facing conflict. Indeed, Africa itself has begun to make significant economic and social progress in recent years. But by showing the Council's concern for Africa's remaining conflicts, members have signalled their readiness to further that progress and make it last for all of Africa.

The report that I present today is guided, above all, by a commitment to honesty and clarity in analysing and addressing the challenges of conflict in Africa. For too long, conflict in Africa has been seen as inevitable or intractable, or both. It is neither. Conflict in Africa, as everywhere else, is caused by human action and can be ended by human action. This is the reality that shames us for every conflict that we allow to persist and emboldens us to believe that we can address and resolve every conflict that we choose to confront.

For the United Nations there is no higher goal, no deeper commitment and no greater ambition than preventing armed conflict so that people everywhere can enjoy peace and prosperity. In Africa, as elsewhere, the United Nations increasingly is being required to respond to intra-State instability and conflict. In those conflicts, the main aim, to an alarming degree, is the destruction not of armies but of civilians and entire ethnic groups. Preventing such wars is no longer a question of defending States or protecting allies. It is a question of defending humanity itself.

Since 1970, Africa has had more than 30 wars fought on its territory, the vast majority of which have been of intra-State origin. Fourteen of Africa's 53 countries were afflicted by armed conflicts in 1996 alone. These accounted for more than half of all war-related deaths worldwide, resulting in more than 8 million refugees, returnees and displaced persons. The consequences of these conflicts have seriously undermined Africa's efforts to ensure long-term stability, prosperity and peace for its peoples. No one — not the United Nations, not the international community, not Africa's leaders — can escape responsibility for the persistence of these conflicts.

Indeed, colossal human tragedies have taken place in Africa over the last decade — tragedies that could and should have been prevented. Not enough was done to address the causes of conflict. Not enough was done to ensure a lasting peace. Not enough was done to create the conditions for sustainable development. It is a reality that must be confronted honestly and constructively by all concerned if the people of Africa are to enjoy the human security and economic opportunities they seek and deserve.

Today, in many parts of Africa, efforts to break with these past patterns are at last beginning to succeed. It is my aspiration that this report will add momentum to Africa's renewed quest for peace and greater prosperity. The report strives to do so by offering an analysis of Africa's conflicts that does justice to their reality and seeks answers in their sources. It strives to do so by proposing realistic and achievable recommendations which, over time, may reduce if not entirely end Africa's conflicts. And it aims to summon the political will of Africans and non-Africans alike to act when action so evidently is needed — the will without which no level of assistance and no degree of hope can make the difference between war and peace in Africa.

The sources of conflict in Africa are as varied and complex as the continent itself. In this report, I have sought to identify the kinds of actions that most effectively and most lastingly may address those conflicts and resolve them.

The significance of history and of factors external to Africa cannot be denied. But, more than three decades after African countries gained their independence, there is a growing recognition among Africans that the continent must look beyond its colonial past for the sources of and the solutions to its current conflicts.

The proposals that I set forth today require, in some cases, new ways of thinking about African conflict. In others, they require new ways of acting. Whether in peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance or post-conflict peace-building, genuine and sustainable progress depends on three critical factors: a clear understanding of the challenge; the political will to respond to that challenge; and the resources necessary to provide the adequate response.

Equally important is the understanding that peace and development remain inextricably linked — one feeding on the other, enabling the other and securing the other. The renunciation of violence as a means of gaining or holding political office, or of gaining power, is only the beginning. Then must follow a renewed commitment to national development founded on sober, sound and uncorrupted economic policies.

A number of African States have made good progress in recent years, but others continue to struggle. Poor economic performance and inequitable development have resulted in a near-permanent economic crisis for some States, greatly exacerbating internal tensions and greatly diminishing the Governments' capacity to respond to those tensions.

Good governance is now more than ever the condition for the success of both peace and development. It is no coincidence that Africa's renaissance has come at a time when new and more democratic forms of government have begun to emerge and take root.

What we have learned over the past decades is that, with political will, rhetoric can truly be transformed into reality. Without it, not even the noblest sentiments will have a chance of success. With sufficient political will on the part of Africa and on the part of the international community, peace and development in Africa can be given a new momentum.

Africa is an ancient continent. Its lands are rich and fertile enough to provide a solid foundation for prosperity. Its people are proud and industrious enough to seize the opportunities that may be presented. I am confident that Africans will not be found wanting in stamina, in determination or in political will.

Africa today is striving to make positive change, and in many places these efforts are beginning to bear fruit. In the carnage and tragedy that afflict some parts of Africa, we must not forget the bright spots or overlook the achievements that have been made. What is needed is for those achievements to grow and multiply throughout Africa.

Three areas deserve particular attention. First, Africa must demonstrate the political will to rely upon political rather than military responses to problems. Democratic channels for pursuing legitimate interests and expressing dissent must be protected and political opposition respected and accommodated in constitutional forms.

Secondly, Africa must summon the political will to take good governance seriously, ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law, strengthening democratization and promoting transparency and the capability of public administration. Unless good governance is prized, Africa will not break free of the threat and the reality of conflict which are so evident today.

Thirdly, Africa must enact and adhere to the various reforms needed to promote economic growth. Long-term success can be achieved only if African Governments have the political will to enact sound economic policies and to persevere in their implementation until a solid economic foundation has been established.

Political will is also needed from the international community. Where the international community is committed to making a difference, it has proved that significant and rapid transformation can be achieved. With respect to Africa, the international community must now summon the will to intervene where it can have an impact and invest where resources are needed.

New sources of funding are required, but so too is a better use of existing resources and the enactment of

trade and debt-relief measures that will enable Africa to generate and better reinvest its own resources. Concrete steps must be taken, and I have made a number of concrete recommendations towards this end.

Let us never forget that it is the persistence of poverty that is impeding the full promise of peace for all of Africa's peoples. The alleviation of poverty must be the first aim of our efforts. Only then — only when prosperity and opportunity become real — will every citizen, young or old, man or woman, have a genuine and lasting stake in a peaceful future for Africa — politically, economically and socially.

In this report, I set out to provide a clear and candid analysis of the sources of Africa's conflicts and why they persist. I have recommended actions and goals to reduce conflict and in time to help build a strong and durable peace. I have urged Africans and non-Africans alike to summon the political will to rise to the challenge which together we must all confront.

The time is long past when one could claim ignorance about what was happening in Africa or what was needed to achieve progress. The time is also past when the responsibility for producing change could be shifted onto other shoulders. It is the responsibility we all must face.

Allow me to conclude by saying that the United Nations not only seeks, but welcomes, this responsibility. For we wish, above all, that this report should mark a new beginning in the relationship between the United Nations and Africa on these issues. Let us make that beginning today and together.

The President: Representing the Security Council, I should like to express my sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General for preparing this report on the situation in Africa and for presenting it to us today.

I wish to recall that, on 25 September 1997, the Security Council, at its 3819th meeting, which was held at the ministerial level, requested the Secretary-General to submit a report containing concrete recommendations regarding the sources of conflict in Africa, on ways to prevent and address these conflicts, and on how to lay the foundation for durable peace and economic growth following their resolution. This request was made in view of the continuing grave concern of the Council over the number and intensity of armed conflicts on the continent. The Council expressed its view that such conflicts threaten regional peace, cause massive human dislocation and suffering, perpetuate instability and divert resources from long-term development.

I am confident that I speak for all the members of the Security Council when I say, Mr. Secretary-General, that we in the Council are impressed by the commitment and insight which you have brought to your task. We especially appreciate your incisive observations and carefully structured recommendations, and highly commend your efforts in preparing this report. The recommendations you made in the report are indeed concrete and comprehensive, and provide us with ample basis for our discussion as to how we can best contribute to the peace, stability and prosperity of the African continent.

It is my intention, as President of the Security Council, to request that Council members study the report carefully and thoroughly, and then to convene a formal meeting of the Security Council on 24 April 1998 to discuss the report. I would invite other Members and observers of the United Nations wishing to do so also to participate in that discussion.

On this occasion, I should like to state that the Security Council reaffirms its intention to review promptly the recommendations of the Secretary-General with a view to taking steps consistent with its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations.

Once again, Mr. Secretary-General, thank you for coming to this formal meeting of the Council and presenting your report to its members, in the presence of the general membership of the United Nations.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, the Security Council will continue its consideration of the item on its agenda at a meeting to be held at 10 a.m. on 24 April 1998, at which there will be an open debate on the report of the Secretary-General.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.